



United  
Persons with  
Disabilities

# CO-CREATING KNOWLEDGE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE COLLABORATIVE



Activity Report | Oct. 2024



United  
Persons with  
Disabilities



American Centre  
Kampala



VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH  
UNIVERSITY (VCU)  
Rehabilitation Research  
and Training Centre

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# Message from our Chair

*Our participants have since taken action to amplify the voices of marginalized communities in the fight against climate change. Together, we launched the #InclusiveClimateAction campaign, which has mobilized over 200 signatures for a petition urging local government officials to prioritize inclusion in all local government climate initiatives.*

Dear **friends**,

In 2024, the Urban Movement Innovation (UMI) funds supported our efforts to unite with a shared purpose: to take action in support of marginalized communities striving to have a voice in the climate change discourse. The *Co-creating Knowledge for Climate Change collaborative*, emerged from that call to action.

With an attendance of over 50 individuals both in Uganda and beyond, the project facilitated meaningful connections through a blend of virtual and in-person engagements, aiding in the identification of the most effective solutions in the fight against climate change.

Our participants have since taken action to implement the lessons learned. Together, we launched the #InclusiveClimateAction campaign, which has mobilized over 200 signatures for a petition urging local government officials to prioritize inclusion in climate initiatives. Our strategic approach is to foster local collaboration toward inclusive climate decision-making through a framework that engages vulnerable groups in knowledge co-creation.



Harunah Damba, Chair of United Persons with Disabilities, speaks out in a media interview, launching the **#InclusiveClimateAction** campaign. This campaign led to the signing of a petition, which has so far gathered over 200 signatures, urging local government officials to prioritize marginalized voices in climate discussions.

# Introduction

*The workshop equipped participants with the tools and knowledge to lead public deliberation on climate issues, with a focus on addressing contentious and divisive topics.*

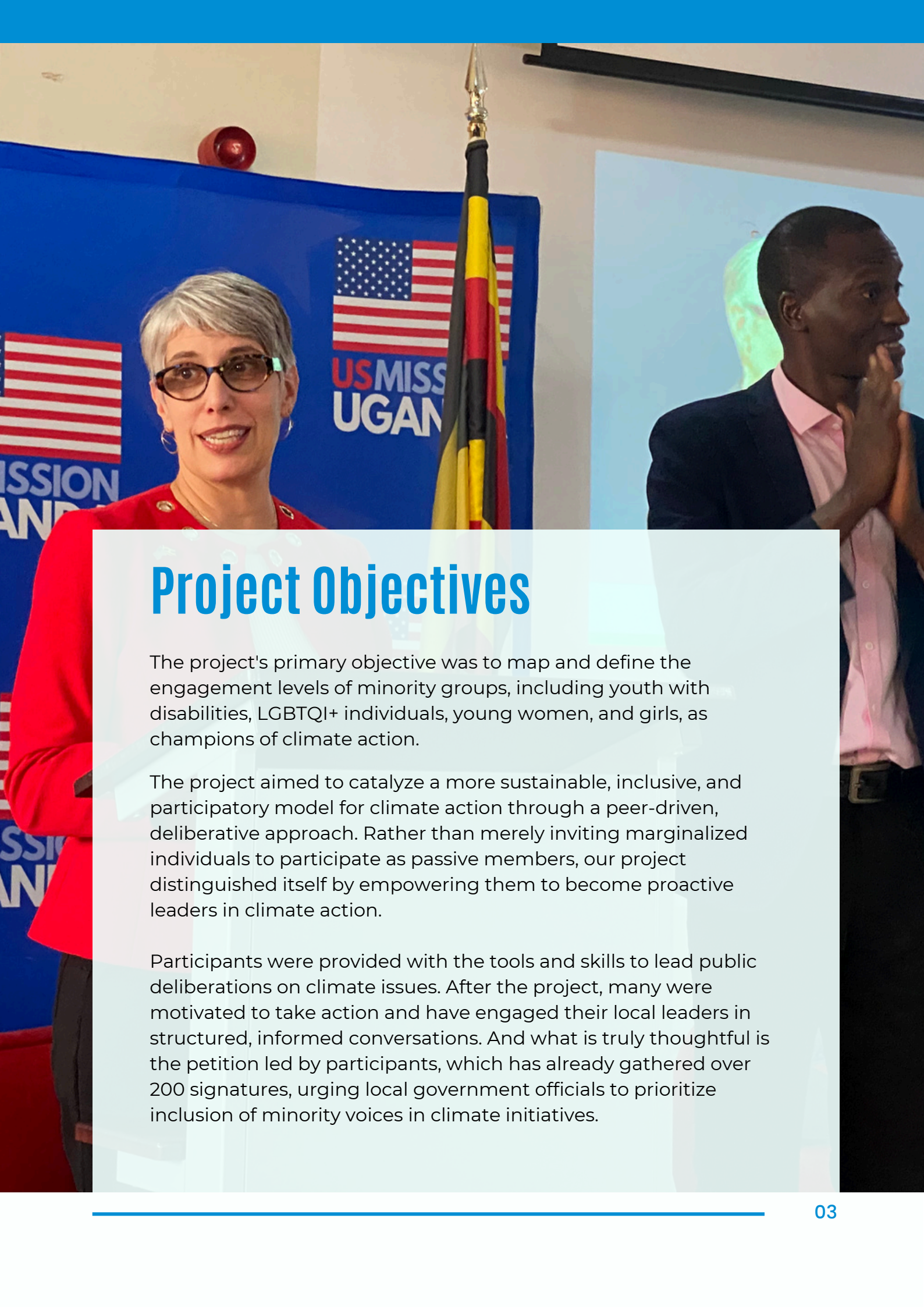
For so many years, people with disabilities, young women, and girls have often been overlooked, battling discrimination in various aspects of society. In the context of the escalating climate crisis, these groups face an even greater threat due to increased vulnerability to climate-related disasters. Yet, despite their heightened risks, they remain largely excluded from climate change decision-making processes.

Instead of simply encouraging these young people to take action, our project invited them to work together to model a more thoughtful and deliberate approach to climate action for themselves and their peers.

Through this project, we brought together 50 emerging youth leaders, climate justice defenders, disability activists, and social entrepreneurs, aged 18-35, all of whom have distinguished themselves through their work on projects, programs, or initiatives aimed at protecting the environment and are diverse, equitable, and inclusive in practice including categories of people who are often excluded from making decisions on issues that affect them.

The workshop equipped participants with the tools and knowledge to lead public deliberation on climate issues, with a focus on addressing contentious and divisive topics. The training included a mix of in-class sessions, panel discussions, and guided discussions led by subject matter experts.

Participants had the opportunity to engage firsthand in the deliberative process using the National Issues Forums approach (<https://www.nifi.org>). Through this approach, they were able to identify, frame, and discuss climate change issues they experience in their communities in a way that fosters deliberation rather than adversarial politics.



## Project Objectives

The project's primary objective was to map and define the engagement levels of minority groups, including youth with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, young women, and girls, as champions of climate action.

The project aimed to catalyze a more sustainable, inclusive, and participatory model for climate action through a peer-driven, deliberative approach. Rather than merely inviting marginalized individuals to participate as passive members, our project distinguished itself by empowering them to become proactive leaders in climate action.

Participants were provided with the tools and skills to lead public deliberations on climate issues. After the project, many were motivated to take action and have engaged their local leaders in structured, informed conversations. And what is truly thoughtful is the petition led by participants, which has already gathered over 200 signatures, urging local government officials to prioritize inclusion of minority voices in climate initiatives.

# Onboarding Sessions

“Stories take us on a journey of discovery, experience, emotions, places, facts, and realities. Stories make us care, give us new ideas, and challenge our ways of understanding the world — Nery Birdsell

The workshop began with a series of four onboarding online sessions, open to all, and attended by over 50 individuals from Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Cameroon, Mauritania, India, and the United States. The sessions featured presentations and panel discussions with subject matter experts. While highly informative, these sessions were designed to prepare our target participants by outlining what to expect and introducing key topics to prime them for the in-person sessions.

Among the presentations were "The Intersectionality of Climate Justice and Disability Rights," by Soovan Sharma, Executive Member of the Commonwealth Disabled People Forum, and "Effective Communication and Advocacy for Diverse Communities," by Nery Birdsell from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and Elizabeth Rwabu from Makerere University. Panel discussions included "Environmental Justice and Unheard Voices: Lessons from Citizen Juries in Environmental Discourses in Countries such as Ireland and the U.S.," moderated by Hezzy Smith, Esq, Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, and Joshua Drywater, Director of Native Initiatives at VCU, and "Developing Effective Strategies to Elevate Minority Voices in Climate Action: Lessons from Vanessa Nakate's and Greta Thunberg's Climate Advocacy Efforts," moderated by Mercy Fri Koti from Cameroon.

The onboarding sessions were archived for future reference and can be accessed [here](#). Following the onboarding sessions, target participants were invited to a weeklong residential training. These participants, hailing from central and eastern Uganda, convened in Kampala, where they acquired the skills and tools necessary for effective public deliberation.

**Get Involved**

**How would Social Media impact Advocacy?**

Traditional Media	New Media
Radio stations	Internet
Television	Websites
Print media	International media
Newspaper	Social media
Media outlets	• Facebook
Social networking	• YouTube
Supporters	• Hashtags
Magazines	• Twitter
Film media	• Instagram

!! Identify Media Restrictions !!

**1.3 billion**  
people experience significant disability; 16% of the world population (WHO, 2023)

**60-80 million**  
10% of population in Africa (Disabled World, 2024)

12.4% of population in Uganda (Disabled World, 2024)

**Invisible • Rising**

# In-person Sessions at Eureka Place Hotel

## *Days one, two, and three*

The in-person sessions were held at two distinct locations: Eureka Place Hotel and the American Centre, both located in Kampala. Activities on days one, two, and three were held at the Eureka Palace Hotel, while days four and five took place at the American Centre.

On day two, participants were immersed in a series of expert-led discussions, building on the foundational knowledge from the earlier onboarding sessions. These discussions provided further expertise on: (1) understanding the intersectionality of climate justice and disability rights, (2) effective communication and advocacy techniques for engaging diverse communities, and (3) case studies and best practices of youth-led climate initiatives.

Experts from various fields took the stage to offer detailed presentations on effective communication and advocacy strategies, guiding participants on how to engage diverse communities in the fight for inclusive climate action.

A major highlight of the day was the exploration of case studies that

showcased successful, real-world examples of initiatives prioritizing inclusivity, non-violence, tolerance, and justice. One such case study, titled '*Creating Space for Critical Reflections: Lessons from Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM)*,' delivered by Olivia Abenakyo, program administrator at Michigan Fellows African Initiative (MFAI) provided valuable lessons on addressing sensitive issues within communities, particularly the intersection of gender, violence, and disability.

On day three, participants engaged in dynamic and interactive discussions aimed at deepening their understanding of how to name and frame issues for public deliberation. These conversations were structured around key questions designed to encourage personal reflection and collective problem-solving. These questions included: How is climate change affecting you personally? What areas of your community are the most vulnerable to climate change? What are your thoughts/solutions that can help solve these issues?



Some of the participants attending the workshop pose for a photo at Eureka Place Hotel in Kampala.

# In-person Sessions at American Centre, Kampala

## *Days Four and Five*

**D**ays four and five of the workshop were held at the American Centre. The focus of the day's activities shifted towards a deeper analysis of the key themes that had emerged from the guided naming and framing exercise from day three. Common issues were categorized into cohesive thematic groups, laying the groundwork for more focused, solution-oriented discussions.

Day four's session adopted the National Issues Forums (NIF) approach to foster deliberative dialogue. Participants deliberated on critical issues surrounding climate change, framing them in ways that encouraged open and reflective discussions. Guided by expert facilitators, they collaborated to identify the most pressing issues, weighing various perspectives and potential solutions. This deliberative approach enabled them to confront difficult questions, consider trade-offs, and explore diverse viewpoints, leading to a deeper understanding of the issues and their impact.







Professor Justine Namaalwa, second from the right, moderates a panel discussion at the American Centre, where participants share firsthand experiences of climate change and discuss the actions that must be taken to address this.

The final day of the workshop focused on creating a clear and actionable path forward, one that would continue to build on the momentum generated throughout the week. Key stakeholders, including officials from the U.S. Embassy in Kampala, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and the Kampala Capital City Authority, participated in the discussions alongside journalists.

A major highlight of the day was a panel discussions, where participants and guests from key sectors, set the stage for collaborative thinking on how to tackle climate challenges.

The experts and officials shared strategies for local collaboration and engaging key stakeholders to drive community-driven solutions that promote non-violence, tolerance, and equity in addressing climate challenges.

Participants worked in groups to design a more thoughtful and deliberate

approach to engaging minority groups in climate action, drawing on insights gained throughout the workshop.

The day wrapped up with an inspiring profiling session, highlighting the valuable coping, preventive, and adaptive measures being implemented by these often-overlooked, marginalized groups. Participants were asked to explain how they have contributed to environmental protection and climate change mitigation efforts through their work. This reflection not only celebrated their efforts but also provided a powerful assessment of how deeply engaged these individuals are in addressing the climate crisis.



Panelists engage in a discussion at the American Centre on why climate change efforts must prioritize the voices of those most affected by its impacts.



# Key Highlights

## 01 **The importance of deliberative dialogue in finding effective solutions to climate change**

The project highlighted that deliberation is essential in moving beyond one-sided arguments. This approach encouraged open, reflective discussions that allowed participants to weigh different perspectives, consider trade-offs, and collaboratively develop solutions that are inclusive, sustainable, and impactful. Everyone had something valuable to contribute, and no one was considered too disabled or too indifferent to make a contribution.

## 02 **The role of marginalized voices in ensuring equitable climate action**

The workshop taught us that climate action must include everyone. Each of us has unique insights and solutions that are often overlooked. Climate action should center the voices of those closest to the problem in finding effective, sustainable, and equitable solutions.

## 03 **The role of personal experience in fostering solidarity and collective action**

The workshop emphasized the role of personal experience in fostering solidarity and collective action. When individuals share their lived experiences, it helps build empathy and understanding, creating a stronger sense of unity. These personal stories inspire collective action, motivating people to work together towards common goals in addressing climate change.

# Participants' Key Takeaways

“I am a fashion enthusiast, and I am fascinated by how waste materials can be recycled into useful items. I am the founder of Ikosapparel, a model brand that produces garments made from recycled materials. Through this, I am able to contribute to addressing climate change in my community — Racheal Ikomera

## Sharif Semeere, Disability Inclusion Advocate

I came here unsure, but now I see how much impact even small, we can have on the global climate fight.



## Racheal Ikomera, mental health and Climate justice Activist

I am a fashion enthusiast, and I am fascinated by how waste materials can be recycled into useful items. I am the founder of Ikosapparel, a model brand that produces garments made from recycled materials. Through this, I am able to contribute to addressing climate change in my community.

## Sheilla Jessica Aanyu, FOUNDER TREES 4 LIFE-UGANDA

The insights shared during the workshop have reinforced my belief in the importance of grassroots efforts. I learned that protecting the environment isn't just about policies; it's about the everyday decisions we make, as individuals and communities.



Some of the participants pose with a special guest from the US, holding a placard that reads, 'Focus on the person, not a disability program,' during the #InclusiveClimateAction campaign mobilization drive at Kyambogo University.

## Aminah Nassali, President, UGANDA YOUTH COALITION FOR SDGS

The workshop has been an eye-opener for me. It's shown me how vital it is for young people to be actively involved in climate action. I'm leaving with fresh ideas and a renewed commitment to push for solutions that are not only sustainable but inclusive, ensuring that all voices, especially from vulnerable communities, are heard in the fight against climate change.



# Looking Forward

*Vision for the future*

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Looking ahead, our vision for future collaborations is rooted in the belief that the impact of our work can continue to grow and thrive through meaningful partnerships. The successes and lessons learned from this project have ignited a strong commitment to building connections that drive lasting change.

Following the workshop, we will maintain virtual engagement with target groups, encouraging them to design their own initiatives that engage their local communities. We are excited about the possibility of meeting in-person again to further deepen these efforts.

We're honored to lead these efforts and are committed to holding future workshops regionally across Uganda, rotating through the West, North, East, and Central regions. We envision significant growth in this initiative, one that will inspire many people to take action in ensuring climate change efforts are inclusive and center the voices of those most closely affected by the problem.

These workshops are designed as short-term longitudinal studies, and the data generated from these engagements will play a crucial role in designing a framework for engaging with and amplifying local knowledge, empowering those closest to the problem to lead the way in finding effective, sustainable solutions.

# Acknowledgements

The workshop was made possible through a microgrant from the Urban Movement Innovation (UMI) Fund, which covered essential costs such as logistics, accommodation, facilitators' allowances, and materials and supplies.

We appreciate the cordial partnership and the privilege of learning from subject matter experts from prestigious institutions such as the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC), Harvard Law School Project on Disability (HPOD), and renowned networks like the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities and the Professional Fellows Program Alumni Network.

We are grateful to Dr. Wendy Parent-Johnson, Senior Director of Native Initiatives at RRTC and Professor in the Department of Counseling and Special Education at VCU, who provided a Zoom platform for our onboarding sessions and dedicated a YouTube space on the VCU RRTC site to store recordings for future reference. Our thanks also go to the American Centre, which hosted us on days four and five of the workshop.

*We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to a more inclusive climate change action*

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## Contact



United Persons with  
Disabilities  
Wellspring Rd, Kampala  
Uganda

<https://upds-uganda.org>  
[info@upds-uganda.org](mailto:info@upds-uganda.org)  
+256786336753